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Review: Embedded Librarians: Moving Beyond One-Shot Instruction

Lia Vella

Arthur Lakes Library, Colorado School of Mines, lvella@mines.edu

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Review: Embedded Librarians: Moving Beyond One-Shot Instruction

Lia Vella (lvella@mines.edu)

Reference & Instruction Librarian, Arthur Lakes Library, Colorado School of Mines

Embedded Librarians: Moving Beyond One-Shot Instruction, Cassandra Kvenild and Kaijsa Calkins, eds. (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2011), 235 pp.

For the first time last year, my library tried an “embedded” relationship with a required freshman class. As a Reference & Instruction Librarian, I attended the lectures, worked with each of the class sections, and created and staffed a “Help Station” with a rotating display of relevant books and articles. This book, *Embedded Librarians: Moving Beyond One-Shot Instruction*, was, therefore, of interest to me and helped me to formulate ideas about how I wanted to implement my own program. I also began to wonder how many other librarians out there are walking in my shoes as they consider EL programs. If the listservs and news items I’ve read are any indication, “embeddedness” is becoming popular in librarianship and, in fact, is no longer new. So while it’s no surprise to see Kvenild and Calkins’ edited volume on the subject, the only question is, “why did it take so long?”

The first two chapters provide an excellent backdrop for the subsequent ones and are likely to be useful reading for librarians in many settings. Matthew Brower, the author of Chapter 1, describes the concept of embedded librarianship (EL) and breaks it down into the components that characterize all of its manifestations. Brower then outlines a brief history of EL, which began with medical librarians shadowing health practitioners in the 1970s and eventually took hold in special and academic librarianship. Drawing from a literature review, Brower describes the varieties of EL found in academic settings and offers components for a good EL program elaborating on how to apply EL in academic settings. In Chapter 2, David Shumaker presents an analysis of academic EL in support of his thesis that “the task of developing the embedded librarian’s role is not finished” and that

the full potential of such an enterprise has yet to be reached. Again, the literature review portion of this chapter provides a useful list of resources.

The remaining chapters are primarily descriptive rather than analytical, and for this reason, it is unlikely that readers will need to read all of them. The Introduction provides a useful, concise description of each of the sixteen chapters in the book. I would recommend using the Introduction to decide which of the sections are relevant for EL projects at your library. While each author offers a different variant of embeddedness, and most include a literature review as well as helpful advice, it can become tedious to read the descriptive accounts that comprise most chapters. That being said, this book presents an interesting EL smorgasbord, with embedded librarians providing services from online instruction to department-specific initiatives (i.e., dance), to graduate programs and residence halls.

This book offers a brief history of EL, its theoretical underpinnings and much experiential wisdom from the field, and it will be of interest to anyone who is just beginning an embedded librarian program or who is thinking about starting one. The authors, novice and veteran alike, provide varying perspectives on the subject; their contributions will inspire, inform, caution, and provide justification for EL projects elsewhere.

